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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001329

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: (C) PREVAL FEELS ATTACKED BY VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE
IN CULTURE MINISTER

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 1276
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 1294
[1](#)C. PORT AU PRINCE 1134
[1](#)D. PORT AU PRINCE 1240

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Chamber of Deputies passed a vote of no confidence against Minister of Culture and Communication Daniel Elie on July 31. The deputies alleged that the minister had committed malfeasance in his distribution of funds for Haiti's annual Carnival celebration in February. President Preval views the move as an attack against his government and against him personally. He subsequently told Elie and the rest of the Cabinet to continue working as usual. The deputies, meanwhile, admit that they are sending a message to the Preval government that the time has come to reshuffle the Cabinet, validating Preval's concern that votes against his ministers will continue. Parliamentarians' desire for government handouts plays a central role in the strike against Elie, and is likely a back-handed way to show their disapproval for Preval's fight against corruption, at least insofar as it affects their access to ministerial slush funds. End summary.

Minister of Culture Revoked

[1](#)2. (U) After more than a week without achieving a quorum in the chamber of deputies, 87 out of 99 deputies attended the July 31 interrogation of Minister of Culture Daniel Elie. The deputies passed a vote of no confidence against Elie, with 68 deputies voting for, five against, and 14 abstaining. The formal revocation had nine articles, but the principle accusation was that Minister Elie misused 80 million Haitian gourdes (approximately USD 2.25 million) during the annual Carnival celebrations in February. Elie dispensed funds for only the two biggest festivals, in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, and did not provide funding to each individual district as the ministry has done in previous years. Despite the vote, the GoH has made no moves thus far to dismiss or sanction Elie.

Preval: This is War

13. (C) President Preval told the Ambassador and DCM on July 31 that "The war has begun," referring to parliament's challenge to the government. Preval said he views the revocation of his long-time friend Elie as an attack both on the government and on himself personally. Preval said parliament is acting irresponsibly and implied that they are making a concerted effort to instigate the downfall of the current government. He stated that he has tried to be inclusive of all political parties, inviting parliamentarians, political activists and even Lavalas militant Annette "So Anne" Auguste (ref A) to dine with him at the Palace. Visibly frustrated, Preval cited more than once, "I have invited them for lunch, and they have eaten everything on the table," referring to the deputies. He questioned the logic of forming a coalition Cabinet with different political groups if it does nothing to soothe tensions with the legislative branch. He stated further that the ministers do not exercise discipline over the members of their own parties in parliament.

14. (C) Preval said the real reason behind the revocation is that deputies are angry because Elie budgeted money for Carnival in Jacmel and Port-au-Prince, but not for each deputy's district as is the tradition. Preval's policy has been to do away with the tradition of ministries doling out funds directly to parliamentarians, a system used by many of his predecessors.

15. (C) Preval said that Daniel Elie is only the first salvo, and predicts the parliament will now attempt to revoke other ministers. Only the Ministers of Education and Environment, who still dole out funds to deputies according to the old

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tradition, are safe, according to Preval. (Note: Minister of Finance Dorsainvil went before the parliament on August 1 and later told the Ambassador that his meeting was cordial. End note.) Preval told the Ambassador that he will not stand for this, and that he will not work with a parliament that behaves this way. He added that the U.S. and the rest of the international community who are working to develop parliament are wasting their financial resources.

Ministers: Business as Usual

16. (C) Minister Elie told the Ambassador on August 1 that Preval told him to remain at his post and continue working as usual. He attended Preval's August 1 dinner in honor of SYG Ban Ki-moon in his capacity as Minister of Culture and said he would be in his office the following day. He also noted that he looked forward to working with the Embassy on our cultural projects.

17. (C) Daniel Dorsainvil, Minister of Finance, told the Ambassador on August 1 that Preval and Alexis's message to the Cabinet is that business will continue as usual. Dorsainvil said the idea is to not overreact to the revocation. Political stability is key at this point as Haiti begins to see some positive signs, he said.

Chamber of Deputies: Divergent Explanations

18. (C) President of the Chamber of Deputies Eric Jean-Jacques (Lespwa - Delmas, West) told the Ambassador on August 1 that he attempted to head off the revocation of Minister Elie. He assured the Ambassador that he had worked behind the scenes until the last moment but said he got no support from the government in that effort. (Note: Other government officials said that the vote was one of Jean-Jacques' efforts to thumb his nose at Alexis, who

supported an opposing candidate for the chamber presidency.
End note.)

¶9. (C) Deputy Stephen Benoit (Lespwa - Petionville, West), who voted against the minister, told Poloff that many deputies voted against Elie because of their personal dislike of the minister. In Benoit's view, Elie is arrogant, and mistreats deputies when they visit his office. As a friend of Preval, Benoit added, Elie thought he was invincible, and now the deputies have proved otherwise. Benoit stated that this was a message to the government that it is time to shape up or ship out, and said that if the president does not reshuffle the Cabinet they will continue voting out ministers until he is forced to appoint new ones.

¶10. (C) Deputy Ronald Lareche (Fusion - Capotille, Northeast) was more critical of his colleagues, telling Poloff that the deputies summoned Minister Elie to parliament because they did not receive the traditional handouts during Carnival, even though those funds are supposed to go to the mayors. He also stated that many deputies personally dislike Elie because of his arrogance, citing his tendency to speak French to deputies who he knows only speak Creole.

Consequences for Haitian Democracy

¶11. (C) Comment: Preval presently appears unwilling to meet parliament's demands to reshuffle the Cabinet. The deputies, for their part, are likely engaged in an effort to undermine the Preval government through the back door. By attacking the Minister of Culture, they can continue outwardly supporting Preval's anti-corruption stance but at the same time signal to him that if fighting corruption means taking away their slush funds, they will not stand for it. They likely chose Elie because he has no political party affiliation and no political base apart from his friendship with Preval, and thus was an easy target. By snubbing parliament's decision and keeping Elie in the Cabinet, Preval is fueling the ''war'' he says parliament has begun.

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¶12. (C) Comment continued: At a time when Preval needs to remain closely engaged with parliament to advance Haiti's democracy, his initial response to what he considers a personal attack is to stop working with them altogether. The widening gap between the executive and the parliament may potentially undermine critical progress in justice reform (ref B) and further delay the new law governing indirect elections (ref C), not to mention other pending legislation. In addition, squabbles with elected officials are certainly not going to persuade Preval to move forward with elections for the next group of parliamentarians (ref D) if he continues to view them as adversaries. We will continue to emphasize with the President and the parliament the importance of maintaining a cooperative relationship in order to advance Haiti's democratic process.

TIGHE